

James Madison to Edmund Randolph, January 10, 1788. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.

TO EDMUND RANDOLPH. CHIC. HIST. SOC. MSS.

New York, January 10, 1788.

My dear friend,

I have put off writing from day to day for some time past, in expectation of being able to give you the news from the packets, which has been looked for every hour. Both the French & English have overstayed their usual time ten or 15 days, and are neither of them yet arrived. We remain wholly in the dark with regard to the posture of things in Europe—

I received two days ago your favor of December twenty seventh, enclosing a copy of your letter¹ to the Assembly. I have read it with attention, and I can add with pleasure, because the spirit of it does as much honor to your candor, as the general reasoning does to your abilities. Nor can I believe that in this quarter the opponents of the Constitution will find encouragement in it. You are already aware that your objections are not viewed in the same decisive light by me that they are by you. I must own that I differ still more from your opinion, that a prosecution of the experiment of a second Convention

¹ Randolph's letter was dated October 16, 1787, but not published until some weeks later. It may be seen in *Elliot's Debates*, i., 482. About the time of this letter of Madison's he became more definitely arrayed against the opponents of the Constitution. See Conway's *Randolph*, 99; also *ante*, p. 8, n.

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will be favorable, even in Virginia, to the object which I am sure you have at heart. It is to me apparent that, had your duty led you to throw your influence into the opposite scale, it would have given it a decided and unalterable preponderancy; and that Mr. Henry would either have suppressed his enmity, or been baffled in the policy which it has dictated. It appears also that the grounds taken by the opponents in

different quarters forbid any hope of concord among them. Nothing can be further from your views than the principles of different sets of men who have carried on their opposition under the respectability of your name. In this State the party adverse to the Constitution notoriously meditate either a dissolution of the Union, or protracting it by patching up the Articles of Confederation. In Connecticut and Massachusetts, the opposition proceeds from that part of the people who have a repugnance in general to good government, or to any substantial abridgement of State powers, and a part of whom in Massachusetts are known to aim at confusion, and are suspected of wishing a reversal of the Revolution. The minority in Pennsylvania, as far as they are governed by any other views than an habitual opposition to their rivals, are manifestly averse to some essential ingredients in a National Government. You are better acquainted with Mr. Henry's politics than I can be, but I have for some time considered him as driving at a Southern Confederacy and not further concurring in the plan of amendments than as he hopes to render it subservient to his real designs. Viewing the matter in this light, the inference with me is unavoidable that were a second trial to be made, the friends of a good constitution for the Union would not only find themselves not a little differing from each other as to the proper amendments; but perplexed and frustrated by men who had objects totally different. A second Convention would, of course, be formed under the influence, and composed in a great measure of the members of the opposition in the several States. But were the first difficulties overcome, and the Constitution re-edited with amendments, the event would still be infinitely precarious. Whatever respect may be due to the rights of private judgment, and no man feels more of it than I do, there can be no doubt that there are subjects to which the capacities of the bulk of mankind are unequal,

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and on which they must and will be governed by those with whom they happen to have acquaintance and confidence. The proposed Constitution is of this description. The great body of those who are both for and against it must follow the judgment of others, not their own. Had the Constitution been framed and recommended by an obscure individual, instead of a body possessing public respect and confidence, there cannot be a doubt, that although it would have stood in the identical words, it would have commanded little attention from most of those who now admire its wisdom. Had yourself, Colonel Mason, Colonel R. H. L., Mr. Henry, and a few others, seen the Constitution in the same light with those who subscribed it, I have no doubt that Virginia would have been as zealous and unanimous, as she is now divided, on the subject. I infer from these considerations, that, if a government be ever adopted in America, it must result from a fortunate coincidence of leading opinions, and a general confidence of the people in those who may recommend it. The very attempt at a second Convention strikes at the confidence in the first; and the existence of a second, by opposing influence to influence would in a manner destroy an effectual confidence in either, and give a loose rein to human opinions; which must be as various and irreconcilable concerning theories of government, as doctrines of religion; and give opportunities to designing men which it might be impossible to counteract.

The Connecticut Convention has probably come to a decision before this; but the event is not known here.¹ It is understood that a great majority will adopt the Constitution.

The accounts from Massachusetts vary extremely according to the channels through which they come. *It is said* that S. Adams, who has hitherto been reserved, begins to make open declaration of his hostile views. His influence is not great, but this step argues an opinion that he can calculate on a considerable party. It is said here, and I believe on good ground, that North Carolina has postponed her Convention till July, in order to

¹ Connecticut was the fifth State to ratify the Constitution—January 9, 1788.

have the previous example of Virginia. Should North Carolina fall into Mr. Henry's politics, which does not appear to me improbable, it will endanger the Union more than any other

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circumstance that could happen. My apprehensions of this danger increase every day. The multiplied inducements at this moment to the local sacrifices necessary to keep the States together, can never be expected to coincide again, and they are counteracted by so many unpropitious circumstances, that their efficacy can with difficulty be confided in. I have no information from South Carolina or Georgia, on which any certain opinion can be formed of the temper of those States. The prevailing idea has been, that both of them would speedily and generally embrace the Constitution. It is impossible, however, that the example of Virginia and North Carolina should not have an influence on their politics. I consider every thing therefore problematical from Maryland southward.

I am surprised that Col. H. Lea who is a well-wisher of the Constitution should have furnished Wilkinson with the alarm concerning the Mississippi, but the political connections of the latter in Pennsylvania would account for his bias on the subject.

We have no Congress yet. The number of States on the spot does not exceed five. It is probable that a quorum will now be soon made. A delegate from New Hampshire is expected, which will make up a representation from that State. The termination of the Connecticut Convention will set her Delegates at liberty, and the meeting of the Assembly of this State, will fill the vacancy which has some time existed in her Delegation.

I wish you every happiness,

And am with the sincerest affection,

Yrs.